

ATTACHMENT 4

HHS/ACF HEALTHY MARRIAGE, RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD, POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, RURAL, AND FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

HHS/ACF Key Priorities and Initiatives

The current administration has developed several major initiatives in areas that it feels will benefit children, adults, and society. The Department's Healthy Marriages, Responsible Fatherhood, Positive Youth Development, Rural, and Faith-based and Community initiatives can be promoted among the populations that ACF serves. All should fit with the overall goals of the safety, permanency and well-being of children. We encourage States to propose creative approaches to achieving the goals of these initiatives in the context of the child abuse prevention and child welfare system. The following is a brief description of each initiative:

Healthy Marriage

The Healthy Marriage initiative encourages services to strengthen parental relationships and promote healthy marriages. This initiative's mission is "Helping couples, who choose marriage for themselves, to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages." The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is working with its partners across the country to develop community-wide initiatives to promote healthy marriages and strengthen families. These initiatives will bring together government agencies, faith-based and community organizations, and other partners to offer the knowledge, skills and resources needed to build and sustain healthy marriages. If your State is interested in starting a healthy marriage initiative, or if you are aware of a community initiative already forming, ACF can support those efforts. The next two pages provide more details on this initiative.

Responsible Fatherhood

This initiative's goal is to help men become responsible, committed, involved fathers. The following principles guide the Responsible Fatherhood initiative: (1) all fathers can be important contributors to the well-being of their children; (2) parents are partners in raising their children, even when they do not live in the same household; (3) the roles fathers play in families are diverse and related to cultural and community norms; (4) men should receive the education and support necessary to prepare them for the responsibility of parenthood; and (5) government can encourage and promote father involvement through its programs and through its own workforce policies.

Positive Youth Development

This initiative includes promoting a philosophy of working with youth that models ongoing relationships with adult mentors; safe places with structured activities; healthy lifestyles; opportunities to acquire marketable skills; and opportunities for community service and civic participation. The Positive Youth Development effort involves several agencies within ACF. The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) and the Children's Bureau emphasize positive youth development in the Runaway and Homeless Youth Discretionary Grant program and in the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, respectively. ACF provides additional technical assistance to States through its National Resource Center on Youth Development. For more information, visit: www.nrcys.org/nrcyd.htm

Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

In January 2001, President Bush issued Executive Order 13198 that established five (5) Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives within five Federal Departments, one of which was the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. The President charged each of these Centers with coordinating Department efforts to eliminate policy barriers that prevent faith-based and other community organizations from participating in the provision of social services. We encourage States to include faith-based and community organizations in the coordination of title IV-B and CBCAP related community programs and to include these organizations as sub-grantees or contractors as appropriate. For more information about the HHS Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, visit: <http://www.hhs.gov/fbcj/>

Rural Initiative

Secretary Thompson's Rural Initiative is aimed at doing "a better job of expanding and improving the provision of health care and social services in rural America." There are 54 million Americans who live in rural areas. We encourage States to determine ways to enhance and strengthen programs and services in their rural areas. For more information, visit the HHS Rural Assistance Center at: <http://www.raconline.org>

Healthy Marriage Matters to ACF

Background

Research suggests that family structure is related to child well-being. All things being equal, children who grow up in married, two-parent families do better on a host of outcomes than those who do not. Further, many social problems affecting children, families, and communities could be prevented if more children grew up in healthy, intact families. Examples of social science findings include:

- Married couples seem to build more wealth on average than singles or cohabiting couples, thus decreasing the likelihood that their children will grow up in poverty.
- Children who live in a two-parent, married household enjoy better physical health, on average, than children in non-married households.
- Marriage reduces the risk of adults and children either perpetrating, or being victimized by, violent crime.

Congress acknowledged the importance of married-couple families when it reformed the welfare system in 1996. The 1996 legislation stipulated that three out of the four purposes of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program either directly or indirectly promote healthy marriages. President Bush echoed this sentiment when he indicated that healthy marriages would be a focus of his administration. In proclaiming National Family Week in November 2001, he noted:

“My Administration is committed to strengthening the American family. Many one-parent families are also a source of comfort and reassurance, yet a family with a mom and dad who are committed to marriage and devote themselves to their children helps provide children a sound foundation for success. Government can support families by promoting policies that help strengthen the institution of marriage and help parents rear their children in positive and healthy environments.”

ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative

More recently, ACF began a healthy marriage initiative. This initiative aims to **help couples who choose marriage for themselves to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages**. In practical terms, it involves:

- *Developing demonstrations.* In consultation with states, a number of communities have approached ACF to conduct healthy marriage demonstration projects. These are broad-based efforts to work with key community sectors (e.g., local governments, businesses, civic organizations, non-profits) to strengthen marriages.
- *Emphasizing marriage in Federal programs.* ACF's program offices will promote healthy marriages in every appropriate program. For example, marriage education and enrichment services could be provided,

alongside existing services, to low-income couples who utilize Refugee Resettlement, Children's Bureau, Community Services, or TANF services.

- *Conducting research.* This initiative will use existing funds to explore the types of marriage strengthening services that exist and their effectiveness, so that future resources can be targeted more wisely.
- *Training.* The initiative will provide training about healthy marriage issues to interested Federal ACF staff.

This initiative is ***not*** about:

- Trapping anyone in an abusive or violent relationship.
- Forcing anyone to get or stay married.
- Running a federal dating service.
- Withdrawing supports from or diminishing in any way, either directly or indirectly, the important work of single parents.

Additional Information

ACYF-CB-PI-02-05 included numerous suggestions for implementation of the Healthy Marriage initiative. This PI is available from the Children's Bureau website at:

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/laws/pi/pi00index.htm#2002>

For more information on the Healthy Marriage initiative, visit the ACF website at

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/key.html> or contact Bill Coffin, Special Assistant for Marriage Education, at bcoffin@acf.hhs.gov or (202)260-1550.